

## Geelong Hall of Honour 78 Yarra Street

### History

'After ten years' preparation construction of the Hall of Honour as an adjunct to the Geelong Returned Soldiers' Club is to be commenced immediately.'

So said the *Geelong Advertiser*, 8 November, 1932. The hall's construction paralleled with that of the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance (Hudson & Wardrop 1932-4), another project which had taken a little time to get started. (The architect for Geelong's hall competed unsuccessfully for the St.Kilda Road commission).

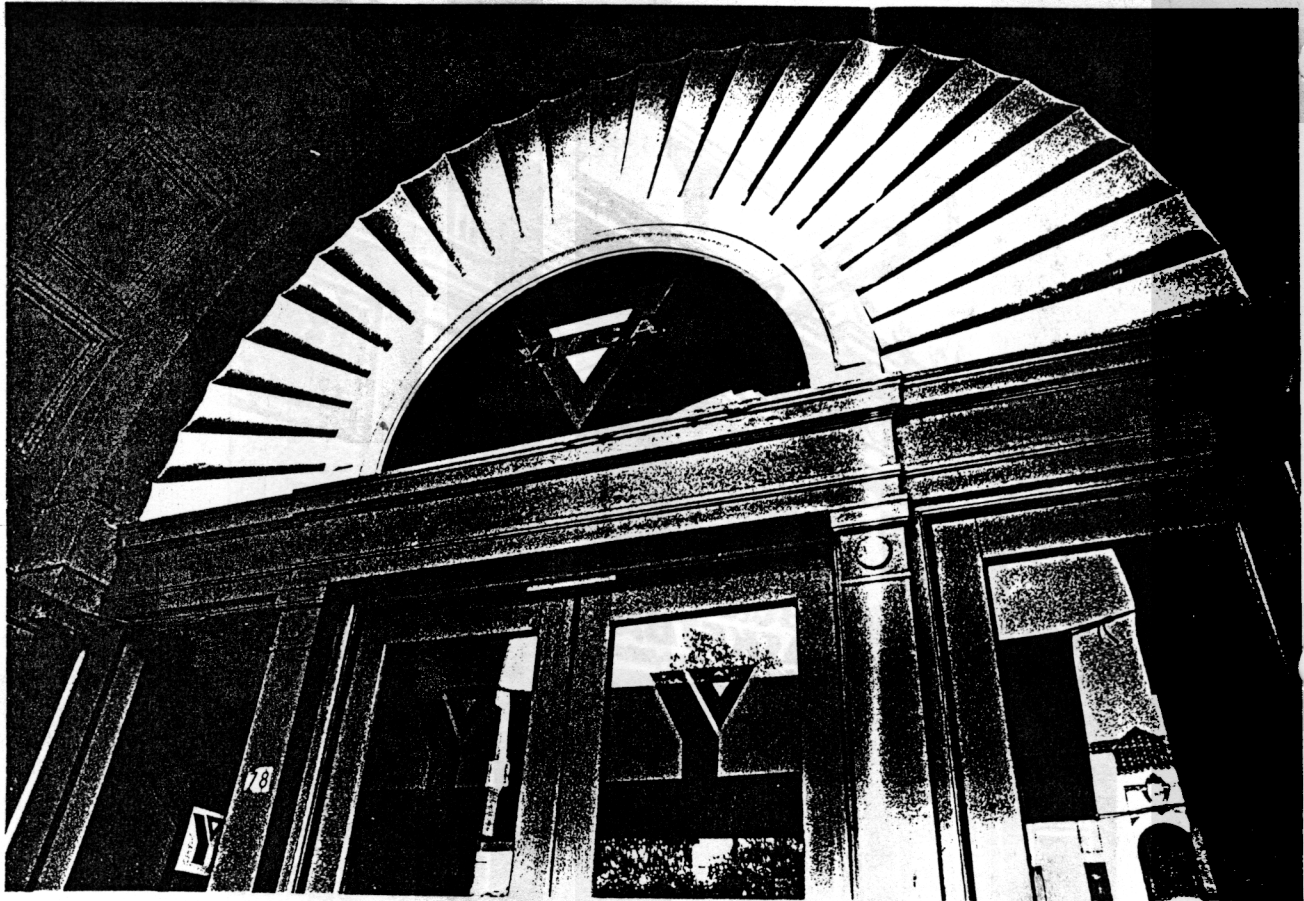
As with the many other memorial halls around the country, public enthusiasm had been high to offer memorials to the First War dead. For example, Bendigo's Soldiers

Memorial Institute (1921) had drawn most of its funds from public subscription with Bendigo Council voting an extra £2000. Northcote's Soldiers & Sailors. Memorial Hall needed £6000 to build and council contributed £2500.<sup>1</sup>

Geelong's Returned Soldiers' Club was created, in 1917, by the Returned Soldiers' Sub-Committee of the National Defence Association and funded by the Geelong War Funds Board. They used rooms at the Moorabool and Myers Streets corner.<sup>2</sup> Robert Vincent was the first Chairman and T L Gurr became honorary Secretary and Treasurer.

The influx of returned servicemen forced a reappraisal of their club rooms which resulted in their purchasing the former Union Bank, corner Yarra and Little Malop Streets.<sup>3</sup> In 1922 the club president, F J Fairnie, an-

<sup>1</sup> Butler, City of Northcote Urban Conservation Study, 1982, vol.1  
<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*



*Rising Sun motif above the entry, showing barrel cove and original doorcase*

nounced a scheme to erect a hall in the old bank's grounds, providing the club could raise sufficient capital. This proposal met acceptance from the Returned Soldiers & Sailors Imperial League of Australia.

Geelong's Hall of Honour was designed by local architect, N E Schefferle, and the builder was Bernard Murphy, also a returned soldier and the lowest tenderer.<sup>1</sup>

The design was reputedly inspired by Sir John Longstaff's painting, *The Menin Gate at Midnight*, which was exhibited at Geelong. The Menin Gate was designed by Sir Reginald Bloomfield as a memorial to allied fallen.

It was intended that primarily the Geelong Hall of Honour should meet the dire need for entertainment facilities in the city. Early plans show a rectangular hall (61 x 51 feet) with a stage at its west end and a balcony at the other. On the north was a supper room and kitchen, whilst an entrance foyer, reception room and cloak rooms extended across the front. The official custodian of the building

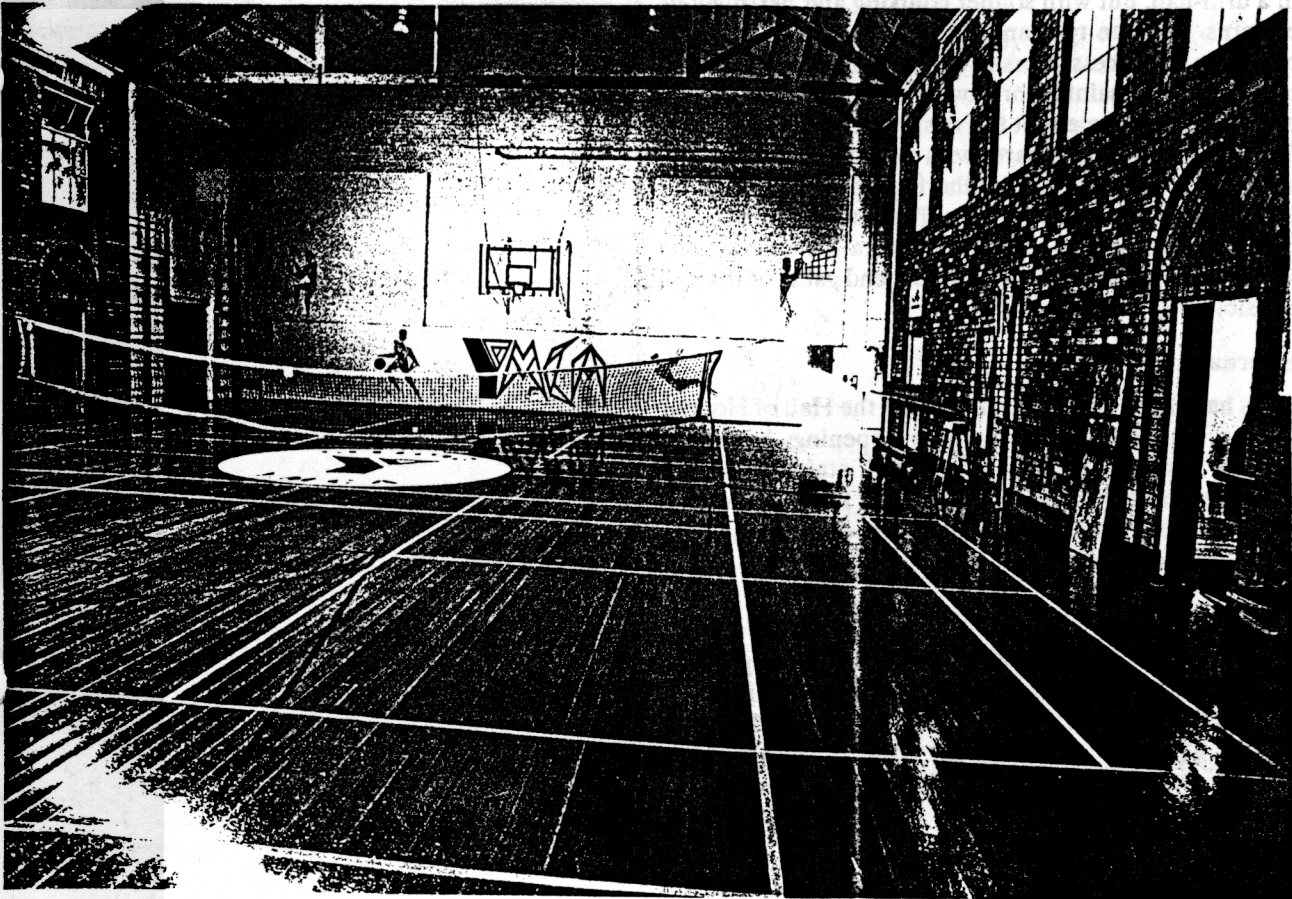
was the Union Trustee Co of Australia Limited when it opened in June, 1933.<sup>2</sup>

#### N.E.Schefferle

The architect, Schefferle, had been articled to the old Geelong firm of Laird & Buchanan and had enlisted from there to serve in the First War at the age of 18.<sup>3</sup> Before returning to Australia, he studied architecture at Liverpool University, revisiting Britain and Europe in 1922. Back in Geelong, he taught architecture at the Gordon Institute for two years prior to starting his own practice in 1926.<sup>4</sup> After failing to win the Shrine of Remembrance competition, he won the Caulfield War Memorial competition from 18 contenders. This was built in 1930, at a cost of £5000.<sup>5</sup> He also provided the premiated design for the Catani Memorial Clock Tower, St. Kilda foreshore, gaining some notoriety for his efforts.<sup>6</sup>

1 GA 8/11/1932; note drawings reputed to give Schefferle & Williams as the architects  
2 GWB DRP4205; Francis, Hall of Honour Geelong, (Deakin Univ., 1991). p.6  
3 G.A. 26/7/30, p.9  
4 ibid.  
5 ibid.  
6 ibid.





*Hall interior showing original patterned brickwork, former proscenium line and what is thought to be the original hardwood floor.*

The end of another War meant greater demand for space in the hall. Around this era it appears to have been used as a dance hall and cinema.<sup>1</sup> Buchan Laird & Buchan designed extensions c1949. The extent of these additions is unclear. The R.S. & S.I.L.A., and the provisions of the original 1917 deed meant that the property (hall and bank) should revert to the Y.M.C.A., which was then undergoing a revival.<sup>2</sup> The Y.M.C.A. had moved in by October, 1953, and by 1954 were intending to renovate.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately for the old bank, the association decided to raise funds by adding shopfronts to it, resulting in the current unfortunate development. Further refurbishment occurred in 1959-60, 1963, 1969, after an increase in the association's activities.<sup>4</sup> More internal alterations were made in 1986.

Conversion of the hall to a gymnasium (including removal of the ceiling and stage) is one of the major changes from these various programmes, along with conversion of the former supper room to a second gym. Throughout each phase, the facade has remained virtually unchanged.

#### Description

Almost symmetrical about its arched entry, the facade styling echoes the fashionable Greek and Georgian revivals, current in the late 1920s. Doric Order pilasters and entablature flank the entrance with original opal sphere bracket lamps centred in the upper part of each side bay. Stylized keystones centre on windows which originally served the cloak room (left) and supper room (right) but are now blocked. Garlands drape across the giant centre archway and victory wreaths line the main parapet wall. Attached as separately roofed pavilions are brick-faced bays either side of the main elevation. These have a plain parapet entablature and limited pressed cement around windows.

Inside the entry arch is a fine barrel-coved panelled ceiling and, in the tympanum of the entrance screen, the rays of a spectacular rising sun (or shell?) are emulated in moulded plaster.<sup>5</sup> Below, the original joinery, complete with pilasters, survives in the entrance screen (refinished), but the doors and glazing have been changed. The windows are multi-pane.

1 D1948-55  
2 op.cit., p.8  
3 ibid.  
4 Francis, p.9; GWB DRP4205  
5 This motif also resembles the Greek shell motif

The main hall is finished in face-brick, much in the manner of a drill-hall, but with soldier coursing and herringbone patterns in the tympanum of the low-relief archways over exits and access doors to the former supper room. A truss line and painted brickwork suggests the original proscenium placement at the west end.

The facade design compares with the contemporary classical revival Masonic hall in Gheringhap Street, but is not quite as mannered or as large. The intended Georgian-revival attic level of the original Yarra Street elevation was not carried out and, instead, the end gable of the hall is visible over the parapet.<sup>1</sup>

#### External Integrity

Signs have been added, one replacing the Hall of Honour sign on the parapet. Two window openings have been covered with showcases and original, stained and lacquered entrance joinery painted over. The crown on the assumed Australian infantry forces badge, set over the door, has been covered.

#### Streetscape

Once presumably closely related to the adjoining Union Bank, the hall now reflects its presence in form only. It also resembles the Corio Hotel opposite, (69-71 Yarra Street).

#### Significance

Architecturally, the Hall of Honour is a near externally complete and successful design in the prevailing classical revival style as carried out by one of Geelong's most promising architects of the era (Schefferle), who was a dual prize winner in the same building type.

It represents well the fund raising efforts of the Returned Soldiers Club and patriotic feelings of the general Geelong Community for the welfare of returned servicemen and women and has performed a public role in Geelong social life, particularly after World War Two. Its design also may reflect the prevailing concern among architects of the era for good manners in streetscape design by its stylistic respect for the adjoining former Union Bank, (since defaced).

